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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 MADRID 001180

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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TAGS: [CASC](#) [CPAS](#) [CVIS](#) [CMGT](#) [PTER](#) [SP](#)

SUBJECT: Consular response to Terrorist attacks in Madrid on March 11, 2004: Lessons Learned

SENSITIVE

1. Summary: March 11, 2004, eleven bombs went off in Madrid, killing 191 people and injuring almost 1,500 in a series of attacks on commuter trains coming into Madrid and at three separate train stations between 7:30 and 8:00 am. Both the Consular Section and Embassy went into immediate action. The Consular Section had three major goals the first day: obtaining information, communicating that information, and providing assistance. By the second day, those goals changed to: providing assistance, verifying information, and communicating broader information. In addition, attaining information about the alleged perpetrators was essential so the visa unit could check for lookout information we might have on those individuals. The following is a summary of actions taken by the consular section in response to the terrorist attack, and we hope can serve as a helpful framework for other consular sections. End Summary.

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Obtaining Information  
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2. The consular section immediately recognized their need to know what had happened and if there were any American citizen victims. We came together as a group for a brief meeting at OOB, we shared the information we had individually gathered, and specific tasks were assigned. All of us were in shock, many concerned about family and friends, and coming together as a section initially was an important first step. Through regular group meetings and clear assignment of duties, everyone contributed to our ability to respond as a team to the crisis. Some staff performed regular duties like interviewing the visa and passport applicants who appeared for service. Processing these routine walk-ins and pre-scheduled visa interviews, was critical to providing a semblance of normality and freed up other staff to focus on crisis response tasks. We recognized that it was vitally important that everyone felt he/she was doing valuable work and through the clear designation of tasks and maintaining office communication through frequent short meetings to touch base, the sense of teamwork was enhanced.

-One FSN tracked news reports and recorded solid leads and factual development. Radio and TV monitors in the Consular Section were tuned into different major news sources. They provided us with a source of immediate information and prevented us from falling behind in communal updates. One FSN's task was to gather and corroborate the information coming from the various sources allowing us to be sure we had accurate and timely information.

-Each person was asked to reach out to his/her best contacts in local police, media and emergency assistance providers. (For example, someone might have had a friend/relative working at the train station or in the press at the scene.) These informal contacts created a network of resources for information, which was not available through media broadcasts.

-Given that we have a large number of student groups, we had our intern reach out to directors of major university programs to ask them to confirm the welfare of their students. We could use this information in responding to calls, e.g. Syracuse University, NYU, Arizona State, Oberlin, etc. have been contacted and confirmed all their students are OK. (Throughout the year we maintain an active outreach program with the Universities, and the good contacts with program directors really helped us in this situation.)

-Throughout the day we used an email collective among consular section chiefs in Madrid to share information continually, touching base on reported

injuries/deaths and on travel advice.

-One FSN and one FSO kept track of all the call-in sheets (see item on Talking Points below), to see if any likely victims could be identified from information provided by callers.

-The Spanish government put a list of injured victims who had been identified on the Internet. We were able to search that site and provide the reference to callers so they could check personally.

-The FSOs began running the Internet list of injured victims through PIERS to see if we could find any matches. We would print out and call likely matches, and we were able to eliminate a number of possible victims in this way, when we could confirm that the match in PIERS was safe and sound. FSNs ran any possible hits through the ACS registration system

-About 3pm, the CG and Senior ACS FSN went to the three major hospitals providing assistance to the majority of victims and to the morgue to search for American victims. We offered to be alert to other foreign victims who might come to our attention, and told the other consular section chiefs at other embassies in Madrid through our CG email collective.

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Communicating Information  
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13. We found that obtaining information and communicating that information regularly were inextricably linked. Both the Department and the front office were eager for any concrete information about victims. We provided regular reports throughout the day.

-First we called the Operations Center and asked to speak to the Consular Duty officer to inform her of the bombings. We had limited information, but this served as a heads up to establish a line of communication.

-Each section/agency in the embassy was asked to confirm that all staff were accounted for. We told everyone in the embassy to call home to be sure our families were ok and to inform our families of our own well being.

-We contacted colleagues at other embassies in Madrid through an email collective among consular section chiefs, which was already established and active. This group was very supportive and email allowed us to keep track without waiting for calls to go through. Phone systems were disrupted most of the day.

-The Embassy held an early morning briefing and arranged for an all agency EAC for early afternoon.

-The Ambassador held an embassy wide town meeting in the afternoon.

-We drafted talking points for callers, with a standard set of questions attached: Who is calling, who are you calling about, why are you concerned (i.e. what makes you think your friend/relative might have been in the train), contact information for all parties, date and time of the call and who took the call. These talking points were distributed throughout the embassy and sent to OCS for them to send on to the US phone information line. We wanted to provide information and obtain information efficiently and to keep track of everything in a usable format.

-We turned the talking points into a Warden message, had it cleared with the duty officer, and included in the message the request that everyone should call home to let family/friends know they were ok.

-We continued to meet as a group in the consular section every hour or so to update each other on information and activities.

-We updated the talking points to address the most frequently asked questions; and we sent a second, updated Warden message in the afternoon. We provided the updated information to OCS so they

could give it to the OCS information contractor.

-We created a roster for after-hours work and double-checked our home phone/cell phone telephone tree list.

-We confirmed the instructions for sending Warden messages so anyone could activate the warden email and fax lists, not just the staff normally assigned. This meant the folks on the duty roster had tools necessary if needed.

-We touched base with other consular operations in country via email and phone (Consulate General Barcelona and six consular agencies). We felt the email contact worked best to ensure everyone had the same information, but follow-up phone calls were effective in reassuring our colleagues we were fine. It also meant we had them on tap for additional assistance if needed. We also needed to be sure they were not experiencing any difficulties.

-We kept in touch with OCS regularly by phone and email throughout the day. A series of meetings throughout the day were held with other embassy sections. Short, focused meetings worked best.

-Upon return from the hospitals and morgue, about 9:30 pm, the CG had a meeting with about ten consular staff working late, called the Ambassador and Consular Duty officer in the Department and sent a short email to OCS.

-The day after the attacks in coordination with OCS, we issued an updated CIS and a Public Announcement on the acts of violence, addressing travel concerns.

-The following Monday the CG went to Alcala de Henares, where about 200 Americans are studying, for a group meeting. This was the point of origin of the trains, and the students were appreciative of the personal outreach and reassurance.

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Providing Assistance  
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14. We identified three American victims of the attack. Fortunately all three suffered relatively minor physical injuries, and there were no reported deaths. Once the individuals were identified (using the Internet lists, PIERS, and personal contacts), we called them to make initial contact.

-We contacted possible victims and/or emergency contacts using the information on passports / registration lists and PIERS. We were able to eliminate some individuals with name match in this way as they or their family confirmed they were not in Madrid at the time.

-We asked the victims to come in. The first victim who came in actually arrived to apply for a replacement passport. One was hesitant to use public transportation, but did come in on Monday even though we offered to come to her. The third has been in contact by phone only and is still hesitant to get on the public transportation.

-The Legat at post wanted to talk with American victims. We made those contact arrangements. We also identified another American who was in the train but not physically injured.

-We requested expedited processing for family members of affected people should they need passports in the US. The DAS/PPT sent a message to all PPT agency directors to expedite emergency issuance and waive the expedite fees.

-When it became clear that many victims were South Americans, we asked VO to assist in getting a message to all WHA posts to request expeditious visa processing for family/friends if needed. VO sent an ALDAC to WHA posts.

-We continue to maintain contact and follow up with the American victims.

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Visa Issues  
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15. As the Spanish law enforcement officials began to identify, arrest and pursue suspects, we worked with

other agencies in the embassy to obtain specific identifying information so we could run name checks through the CCD and check our own issuance records. We were disturbed to note that none of the names we ran resulted in hits based on prior Visas Viper Submissions. We learned that one person had been issued a visa (not one of the principal suspects), and we pulled up the application and provided it to the VO duty officer, the RSO, DS duty officer, Legat and others requesting with a need to know. We reviewed our issuance practices, management review of cases, and provided a context to those requesting the applications so they could better understand how we adjudicate cases and make our decisions. For example, the issuance was to a non-Spanish citizen, but in the six weeks preceding the bomb attacks, we had adjudicated applications from 90 different nationalities. This information was essential for non-consular/visa officials to understand why we might have issued this individual.

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Organizing Ourselves  
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16. One of the basic lessons learned for us, was reviewing how we organized ourselves to accomplish our goals.

- Regular meetings: We gathered regularly with different groups, large and small. The meetings were short and specific goals were important. However, coming together as a group helped us keep a feeling of teamwork as we went about our individual tasks.
- Clear specific tasking: Each person needed to be clear on his/her role. This enabled us to concentrate, bring specifics to the meetings, and not get distracted with peripheral things.
- Created roster for after-hours work, confirmed home and cell phone numbers. The people who could stay, did, those with family commitments could leave. We knew who could be called in for back up, those needing rest could get it.
- Email collectives - This was very important for efficient communications especially when you want to get information distributed but phone lines are disrupted. Very efficient for getting clear information in brief format.
- Wearing identifying tags: When we went to the sites we used badge like tags to identify ourselves. This way people could identify us as US government officials/employees and could approach us for assistance if needed. We had tags pre-made from when we went to the airport after 9/11
- Taking care of each other - We brought in food to share. The Ambassador brought us dinner the first night from his own kitchen. We sent tired people home. We supported people when they were in distress and let ourselves cry if needed. We tried to see when someone needed a quiet supportive talk and to pull individuals aside to talk it out a bit when they looked in need. We still need this as the stress and anxiety has been continuing and we need to be sure renew our reserves physically and psychically in the event further events occur.

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Lessons Learned  
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17. Outreach and good contacts show their value in a crisis situation. Regular communication is essential. Taking care of each other is vital. Being in a country with a strong infrastructure makes your job a lot easier. Let's hope no other post in the world needs this summary.

Manzanares